

Other states and their communities are also showing the way:

- Marin County, **California** has an exemplary, grassroots program that is getting more children walking and biking to school by combining education, community organizing, and engineering improvements. It organizes school-specific teams and community-wide task forces to comprehensively create a safer environment that encourages a new culture of walking and biking. Parents and neighbors map the routes, identify problem areas, and develop recommendations. A task force works with public works and law enforcement staff to implement improvements, like crosswalks and signs.
- The state of California is now in it's fifth annual grant cycle. The state legislature directs \$25 million annually in federal transportation safety funding from a Hazard Elimination Program to fund local engineering improvements near schools. Traditional traffic safety measures like sidewalks, crossings, lights, signs and signals are eligible for funding, as are traffic calming programs around schools to slow speeds of cars and make the streets safer for children walking and biking. In addition, the California Center for Health Training, with support from NHTSA, has build a clearinghouse that offers support to local activist and public agencies as they develop Safe Routes to School Programs in their communities.
- The legislature in **Texas** approved a Safe Routes to Schools program in 2001. The program is supported at a \$3 million annual funding for sidewalk improvements, traffic signals, bicycle and pedestrian paths, and other safety features.
- In Portland, **Oregon**, the City Department of Transportation coordinated education programs and neighborhood traffic calming programs to create "Portland Kids on the Move", a complete traffic safety program using education, engineering and enforcement to reduce traffic related injuries and fatalities.
- In Atlanta, **Georgia**, local elementary schools, law enforcement and parents worked together to create the KidsWalk to School Program. This program mitigates traffic congestion, improves traffic safety and increases physical activity by promoting and organizing "Walking School Buses" and other planned events at elementary schools.
- In Arlington, **Massachusetts**, Walk Boston in partnership with the National Parks Service and 5 local schools is coordinating a walk to school program. A variety of strategies are used to make walking practical, safe and fun, walking in groups with parent escorts, providing safety training, and working with local governments to ensure that their are sidewalks, crosswalks and safer streets.

Active Living: No Kidding

Safe Routes to Schools is about good health. It is about sensible transportation. And it is about putting the two together.

Public health experts and observers agree that children in America face a health crisis of looming epidemic proportions from physical inactivity and ancillary conditions such as obesity. Statistical trends admit no argument that increasing numbers of children are at risk from bad diets and insufficient exercise. Setting things right will not be easy.

But one step is agreed on by everyone. More exercise would be a good thing for huge numbers of children. Nothing would be a bigger help than building regular physical activity into their normal, every day lives. Only 10-15% of children in American today walk or bike to school



Once there was a time when most children in this country provided their own locomotion to and from school. Indeed, part of our national mythology was that walking to school is what built character, treading in the footsteps of Abraham Lincoln. Today, associating Lincoln with getting to school probably has more to do with who in the neighborhood is dropped off from the most upscale SUV.

Safe Routes to Schools is the kind of action agenda that can make a real difference for children and communities. It is integral to the cost effective preventative public health strategies, that could for example, cut into the alarming increase in diabetes among young adults, to say nothing of helping people avoid heart disease, high blood pressure, dangerous cholesterol levels and cancer.

More information about active living as a public health strategy is broadly available. A good source is the **Robert Wood Johnson Foundation**, the nation's largest private foundation devoted exclusively to health issues and publisher of several important research studies on children, nutrition, obesity and activity. Another important source is the **Washington Coalition for Promoting Physical Activity**, which is currently working on a project with the National Governors' Association. (www.beactive.org)

On *Safe Routes to Schools* programs, helpful information is available from the National Highway Traffic Safety Institute (*Safe Routes to Schools – Overview*) and the Surface Transportation Policy Project (*The 2002 Summary of Safe Routes to Schools Programs in the United States*. Saferoutes@transalt.org).

Safe Routes to Schools

A program for communities in Washington and in states across the country

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Citizens and local and state governments across the country are joining the *Safe Routes to Schools* movement. *Safe Routes to Schools* answers the call for how people can work together for traffic safety, transportation efficiency, healthy children, strong neighborhoods and reduced pollution.

Parents, children, school officials and neighborhood groups make *Safe Routes to Schools* programs work. Local governments, health officers, transportation departments, law enforcement agencies and bicycle and pedestrian groups all can work together to support these programs by drawing expertise and funding from many private and public sources. Increasingly, state legislatures across the country are recognizing the importance of a stable, significant funding commitments to these valuable efforts. The federal government has also helped in the past, and can do more in the future in the reauthorization of the Surface Transportation Act (TEA-21)



Safe Routes to Schools contributes to safe and healthy communities by:

Protecting children from traffic deaths and injuries.

In the average year in Washington, thirteen children are killed while biking and walking. Many more are seriously injured. **Safe Routes to Schools** helps to prevent these painful and costly tragedies.

Bringing children better health.

Walking and biking to school is good for children. Active children are healthy children. Too little exercise for many American children is a public health problem that **Safe Routes to Schools** can help solve. Health dividends from active childhood last a lifetime.

Eliminating inefficient and unnecessary driving.

Safe Routes to Schools cuts down car trips, helping parents save fuel and avoid pollution, and easing peak period traffic and congestion. The dividends add up and can make a real difference for families and for their communities.

Strengthening neighborhoods.

Safe Routes to Schools creates public amenities and builds quality of life, making neighborhoods more attractive places to live and raise families. Safe walking and bicycling routes also promote after school and weekend use of public playgrounds, parks, libraries and other community facilities.



Safe Routes to Schools is about engineering, enforcement and education.

A **Safe Routes to Schools** program will be unique in every community, but experience across the state and the country shows that the best results come when schools and local governments bring together engineering solutions, enforcement initiatives and education programs.

For example, engineering approaches in Washington State communities have included:

- In **Kennewick**, the city paved an eight-foot wide asphalt strip on the north side of West 45th Avenue to accommodate children walking to and from Cascade Elementary and Horse Heaven Hills Middle Schools.
- In **Port Angeles** the city built over 2,200 linear feet of six-foot sidewalk, curb and gutter serving Franklin and Hamilton Elementary Schools.
- In **Aberdeen**, signs and lighting were installed at the SR 101 and Scammel Street intersection near Alexander Young Elementary School.
- In **Lakewood**, traffic signal and sidewalk improvements were made on Holden Road near Lake Louise Elementary School.
- In **Kenmore**, crossing improvements were made at 155th Street near the Arrowhead Elementary School, where there had been three serious accidents involving students and motor vehicles within a three-year period.

For enforcement, some excellent examples include:

- In **Aberdeen**, the city recently completed a school zone safety project supported by Washington Traffic Safety Commission (WTSC). This project installed new signs and lighting at the SR 101 and Scammel Street intersection near Alexander Young Elementary School.
- In **Airway Heights**, with support from WTSC, in-pavement flashing crosswalks and solar powered lighting were installed in several school zones.

WTSC has also made grants to elementary school across the state for installation of new florescent-yellow green signs, new

school crossing guard equipment and a Safety Resource Kit, including parents tip sheets in 8 different languages.

In the area of education and encouragement Washington communities have also made excellent strides:

- In the cities of **Kent** and **Kirkland**, elementary schools host annual “Walking School Bus” events to encourage parents to walk groups of students to school.
- In **Spokane**, Regional Health District officials and local police visited schools together to teach biking/walking safety and distribute bike helmets to more than two thousand fifth and sixth graders.
- In **Olympia** at Garfield Elementary School a Walk to School Day event was held for about 500 walkers. This was the third consecutive year of participation in the event and activities, involving hundreds of families, included a Speed Watch, prior to the walk, and an assembly on safety and how transportation choices affect quality of life.

The Bicycle Alliance of Washington is working in school districts to train middle school teachers to help students find safe routes to school. The Bicycle Alliance is also surveying elementary and middle schools to find out more about what they doing to support bicycling and walking.

This past fall a new “School Administrator’s Guide to School Walk Routes and Student Pedestrian Safety” was delivered to all elementary school principals and transportation coordinators. This guide was developed by the Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction, WTSC and WSDOT, all working together with parents and school administrators.

Funding for these programs in Washington has been useful, although limited and unorganized.

Since 1999, WSDOT has administered a \$5 million per biennium grant program appropriated by the legislature called Traffic Safety Near Schools. This program has funded over 70 projects across the state to improve bicyclist and pedestrian safety near schools. Unfortunately, this program was not continued in the 2003-2005 budget. Over 90 proposed projects, already submitted for funding, are on the shelf until money becomes available.

In addition, Washington State Traffic Safety Commission currently administers a \$2 million annual School Zone Safety grant program that pays for safety education and small traffic safety improvements. The program is funded by fines from school zone traffic violations.

Washington State Department of Health recently received \$800,000 in grant funds to promote active community environments. DOH is currently working with regional, county and city governments in areas meeting specific public health criteria across Washington.

Washington needs to build on what’s been done by approving new funding and improving results by bringing everyone’s efforts together.

It is time to make **Safe Routes to Schools** a priority program in Washington with particular attention to coordinating the efforts of separate agencies, officials at all levels, and interested citizens across the state. New funding should take the form of a pool of funds for communities’ **Safe Routes to Schools** programs. Grant procedures should be established that will encourage comprehensive approaches and involve the Departments of Health and Transportation, the Traffic Safety Commission and the Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction in soliciting, evaluating and funding local community initiatives. An Advisory Board including parents, educators, local officials and the representatives of interested advocacy groups should help guide the program and monitor its results.

- Eligible projects for local communities’ programs and state support should include:
- Sidewalks and pathways designed to make biking and walking to school safer and more attractive.
 - Street safety and design improvements near schools and school routes.
 - Safety education curriculums and programs.
 - Community health/activity encouragement initiatives linked to walking and biking
 - School zone and school route law and safety enforcement programs.
 - Health and physical education training that link to the long-term, broad-scale community health benefits from increased levels of childhood physical activity.

We anticipate a state funding contribution of \$5 million per year would allow **Safe Routes to Schools** programs in our state to make a real difference in substantial numbers of communities and neighborhoods. The state should also pursue funding opportunities from the federal government (assuring that state matching funds will be available, for example, for initiatives now being discussed in Washington as part of the TEA-21 reauthorization). By stepping forward as a leader and innovator, Washington can also be positioned to qualify for and attract funds from many sources, including private foundations, that are looking for new and better ways to encourage comprehensive linkages between transportation improvements, active living, and healthy communities.

